

THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

September 20, 1961

TOP SECRET

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: First Meeting with Foreign Minister Gromyko

1. We should not expect a first meeting with Mr. Gromyko to make significant headway toward a solution for Germany and Berlin. It is probable that this encounter will largely go over the ground covered by you and Mr. Khrushchev in Vienna. However, events since June will permit discussion which might open up leads for further talks, either in New York or in Moscow through Ambassador Thompson.

2. In the first meeting, it seems to me that the following points might be made (not necessarily in the order shown).

a. The situation is a most serious and dangerous one which, if not carefully and wisely handled, could lead to war.

b. This crisis is not caused by Western threats against legitimate Soviet interests but by Soviet threats and pressures against vital interests of the West. (Here repeat your position with Khrushchev at Vienna on this point).

c. The steps being taken to strengthen the United States and the West were not stimulated by any desire to threaten the USSR but were in response to the direct threats by the USSR against vital Western interests.

d. The problem is not, as Mr. Khrushchev seems to think, to find a formula to save Western "face" but for the USSR to refrain from invasions of vital Western interests and commitments. We are sensitive to questions of prestige, including the prestige of the Soviet Union, but Mr. Khrushchev has come very close to a total commitment of his prestige to moves which would be wholly unacceptable to the West. This commitment of prestige adds to the danger.

E.O. 11652, Sec. 3(E) and 5(D) or (E)

By John A. S. [illegible]
NARS, Date 10-25-61

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e. The West has made no demands, backed by the threat of force, to change the position of the Warsaw Pact area; Mr. Khrushchev has done just that with regard to allied and NATO commitments.

f. We can understand that Mr. Khrushchev has been anxious about conditions in Communist areas of Eastern Europe, including East Germany. These conditions are not the responsibility of the West. If these conditions have created problems and pressures upon the Soviet Union, the West cannot accept that they be solved at the expense of the West.

g. The crisis does not turn upon whether the Soviet Union wishes to sign an agreement with the East Germans, whatever such an agreement be called. The two have signed agreements before. What is of concern to the West is the effect upon basic Western rights the Soviet Government claims such an agreement would have. An agreement which purported to end the rights of the three Western powers in Berlin and to subject established rights of access to West Berlin to the will of the East Germans would be wholly unacceptable to the West. The Soviet Union, in any arrangements it makes with the East Germans, can safeguard Western rights, as it has done before.

h. Soviet spokesmen have repeatedly referred to negotiations about a peace treaty with the two Germanys and a solution of the Berlin problem on that basis. The West cannot undertake negotiations on any such limited basis but only if the rights, interests and views of all parties are to be considered in relation to all aspects of the problem of Germany and Berlin.

i. President Kennedy has said that if the Soviet Union has genuine concern about the general security situation in Central Europe, these are questions which can be discussed and on which some headway might be made.

j. The President, as Mr. Khrushchev knows, is anxious

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to avoid a catastrophe which might occur through misunderstanding or miscalculation. He wishes to know whether the Soviet Union is prepared to find solutions to outstanding problems on the basis of the vital interests of all parties or whether it has decided to bring the world situation to a climactic confrontation between the Soviet bloc and the Western world. If it is the latter, the future of both our countries and of the rest of mankind is very black indeed.

k. On our side, we believe that both countries have a fundamental interest in avoiding a nuclear holocaust. It has been President Kennedy's hope that ways could be found to reduce tensions and thereby open the way for long-term solutions of the more difficult and complex problems. There is some encouragement, at least, in the agreement reached recently on certain principles applicable to disarmament. Our hope that a genuinely neutral and independent Laos can come into being has not yet been realized but we believe that our two Governments should continue to work at this matter and try to give effect to what we understand is an agreed objective.

l. I am not speaking on the basis of a mandate from other governments - but I know that the Western allies and NATO are united on the point that vital interests in West Berlin must be defended at whatever cost. The West prefers, of course, that its vital interests be sustained by peaceful means but - surrender of these interests cannot be contemplated.

m. We hope that Mr. Gromyko will think about what has been said and that further talks between our Governments might explore constructive possibilities. Meanwhile we underline the importance of keeping the situation under control and that no steps be taken which will add to the dangers of the present scene.

3. I look forward to the opportunity to discuss this with you.

DR

Dean Rusk

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